



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Report by OSCE Head of Mission to Georgia

As prepared for delivery by Chargé d'affaires Bruce Connuck
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
October 31, 2003

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to welcome Ambassador Reeve back to the Permanent Council in this, his first appearance as Head of Mission to Georgia, and to recognize his able engagement on the host of complex issues facing his new mission. I would also like to welcome General Rietveld again to the Permanent Council.

The United States shares the regret already expressed over the lack of substantive progress on the Georgia-Ossetia conflict, despite the efforts of the Netherlands Chairmanship to advance the negotiation process at The Hague earlier this month. We are, nonetheless, encouraged that the Zone of Conflict remains calm, and we applaud Ambassador Reeve's commitment to reinvigorate the dialogue between the sides. We support fully all efforts to resolve the conflict peacefully, and we urge the sides to redouble their efforts to negotiate a comprehensive, mutually acceptable solution, within the Baden framework.

The continuing lack of progress in settling the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia, also causes us great concern. As a member of the Group of Friends of the UN Secretary General, the United States supports and participates fully in the United Nations-led efforts to mediate a comprehensive political settlement to this particularly difficult conflict.

Perhaps one of the few bright spots in these two conflict regions is the recent constructive engagement of the OSCE Special Police Matters Unit, bringing with it the prospect for training at the Kosovo Police School of multi-ethnic police units from both Abkhazia and South Ossetia. We believe that the OSCE has developed significant expertise in this area, and we support this initiative wholeheartedly.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to congratulate Ambassador Reeve and his staff for the Mission's broad engagement in the run-up to the November 2 parliamentary elections. The Mission's technical assistance to the Georgian government has been extensive and practical. As Ambassador Reeve noted in his report, the United States has made a number of substantial voluntary contributions to this effort, both to the Mission itself and to ODIHR.

The Mission's assistance in the selection of the Chairman of the Central Election Commission, and its logistical support to the Commission, have also played a critical role in Georgia's preparations for these elections. I would also like to commend Ambassador Bota for his own pivotal role in the process.

The United States reiterates its full support for the OSCE election observation mission in Georgia. We call on authorities at all levels throughout Georgia to ensure that both domestic and international observers are given full access to polling and tabulation stations, in accordance with the regulations authorizing their presence. It is essential that all precinct-level results be posted immediately, and that official copies be given to observers, without delay or obstruction.

The United States again emphasizes the importance to our societies and peoples, of transparent, democratic elections which comply fully with international principles and with the OSCE commitments that all our governments have freely undertaken.

We call on both the Georgian authorities and the various political parties to respect and uphold the integrity of the electoral process, and to ensure that the parliamentary election this Sunday is conducted peacefully and in accordance with the Unified Election Code.

Mr. Chairman, the United States has already made quite clear on a number of occasions, in this Council and elsewhere, our concerns over the treatment of religious minorities, including Jehovah's Witnesses, in Georgia. We welcome the continued engagement of the OSCE Mission in monitoring the case of Basili Mkalavishvili, as well as the personal stance taken by President Shevardnadze himself. We are disappointed, however, that parts of the government have aligned themselves with a Member of Parliament, Guram Sharadze, who publicly supports Mkalavishvili and his violent creed of religious intolerance.

As Ambassador Reeve noted, this case remains unresolved, and other instances of religious intolerance continue to occur. We call upon the Georgian authorities to strengthen the courts and the institutions that support rule of law, and to put an end to the violent campaign of these religious extremists.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank Ambassador Reeve and General Rietveld for their excellent briefing yesterday on the activities of the Border Monitoring Operation. They and their staffs deserve high praise for their successful implementation since December 2002 of both the expansion to the Dagestan sector and the overall enhancement of BMO activities. What's more, they managed to accomplish the task ahead of schedule and under budget.

In closing, I would like to once again welcome Ambassador Reeve to his new post as Head of Mission in Georgia, and to wish him well in his continuing efforts to contribute to the greater stability of the country and the increased well-being of all Georgians. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.